DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 294 982 UD 026 216

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TITLE Promotion and Retention Policy Implementation Study No. 463.
INSTITUTION San Diego City Schools, CA. Planning, Research and Evaluation Div.
PUB DATE 30 Jun 87
NOTE 43p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; *Course Content; Educational Policy; *Failure; *Grade Repetition; *High Risk Students; Minority Groups; Outcomes of Education; Racial Differences; *Remedial Programs; Secondary Education; *Student Promotion
IDENTIFIERS *San Diego Unified School District CA

ABSTRACT

This evaluation report contains descriptive information about the population of students retained during the 1985-86 school year under a new policy in San Diego City (California) Schools. The courses failed by at-risk secondary school students were analyzed in terms of course content and student outcomes. Intervention strategies attempted with at-risk elementary school students were studied relative to available resources and their effectiveness. The findings include the following: (1) the percent of students retained was lower than the percent of students identified as at-risk; (2) about one-third more males than females were retained; (3) proportionately more Blacks and Hispanics were retained than Whites; (4) nearly three-fourths of the teachers followed the policy to give at-risk students more instruction; (5) teachers thought a key strength of the new policy was to inform parents about their children's at-risk state; and (6) the district was generally pleased with the results of the new policy. Recommendations to improve the policy include further monitoring of personnel, resources, programs, and service delivery for at-risk students. Tables and a short list of references are included. Two appendices give additional statistical data. (VM)

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San Diego City Schools
PLANNING, RESEARCH, AND EVALUATION DIVISION

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PROMOTION AND RETENTION POLICY IMPLEMENTATION STUDY

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No. 463

June 30, 1987

EVALUATION DEPARTMENT REPORT

UD026216

Abstract

Promotion and Retention Policy Implementation Study
June 30, 1987

The evaluation report contains descriptive information about the population of students retained during the 1985-86 school year under San Diego (California) City Schools' recently adopted Promotion/Retention Policy. The courses failed by a sample of secondary students designated as at-risk of retention were analyzed in terms of course content and student outcomes. Intervention strategies attempted with at-risk elementary students were studied relative to available resources and their effectiveness. Recommendations to improve policy implementation included: 1) analysis of personnel, resources, and existing programs that can be used to meet the learning needs of at-risk students; and, 2) school operations staff continue to monitor intervention plans developed for at-risk students to assure that plans are implemented as intended.

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abstract2

PROMOTION AND RETENTION POLICY IMPLEMENTATION STUDY

Report prepared by
Janet L. McDaid

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June 30, 1987

San Diego City Schools
Planning, Research, and Evaluation Division
Evaluation Department
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Data analysis contributions were provided by Stuart Macnofsky, Paul Strand, and Gail Takahata with technical support by Janet Hintzman. Typing and editorial assistance was done by Barbara Mashburn.

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SAN DIEGO CITY SCHOOLS
Planning, Research, and Evaluation Division
Evaluation Department

PROMOTION AND RETENTION POLICY IMPLEMENTATION STUDY

June 30, 1987

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I. Issue/Concern

On May 21, 1985, the Board of Education adopted the Promotion and Retention Policy to be implemented districtwide for grades K-3 and 7-10 during the 1985-86 school year and all grades in 1986-87. As part of the Plan for Systematic Evaluation of the Regular District Programs, the Board of Education approved a two-year study of the Promotion and Retention Policy implementation. This report contains findings from evaluation studies that were conducted to describe the population of students who were retained during the 1985-86 school year and the various intervention strategies used with students who were identified as at risk of retention.

II. Evaluation Findings

Key findings from the evaluation of the promotion and retention policy implementation are summarized below:

1. A total of 1,847 elementary students and 1,389 secondary students were retained in the 1985-86 school year. The percent of students retained in kindergarten and grades 1-3 and grades 7-10 ranged between 2.9 percent of the enrollment in grade three (252 students) to 6.3 percent in kindergarten (639 students) and grade one (612 students). The percent of students who were actually retained was considerably lower than the percent of students identified as at risk of retention reported by the school sites. The large discrepancy between students identified as at-risk and retentions was particularly noted at the primary grade levels.

2. Approximately one-third more males than females were reported as retained at all grade levels.

3. At the elementary school level, 7.9 percent more Hispanic students and 7.3 percent more Black students were retained than their relative population in the district enrollment. At the secondary level 12.8 percent more Black students and 12.2 percent more Hispanic students were retained than their relative population in the district enrollment.

4. Review of the percent of students retained yearly between 1977 and 1986 indicated that highest percent of retentions has been in kindergarten and grade one. Retentions at the secondary level have been steadily on the rise since 1983. The percentages of retentions in grades 1-3 and grades 7-10 increased in 1986 compared to previous years. The largest increase (2 percent) occurred at grade seven. The Promotion and Retention Policy specifies different criteria for retention of elementary students and for retention of secondary students.

5. Approximately twice as many at-risk secondary students who failed English, mathematics, and social studies courses were retained than were promoted. A higher percent of at-risk students passed science courses irrespective of whether they were retained or promoted.

6. The percent of at-risk Hispanic students who received failing grades in English, mathematics, social studies, and science courses exceeded their representative numbers in the district enrollment by between 9.0 to 11.6 percent. The percentages of at-risk Black students who received failing grades were 12.8 to 20.6 percent in excess of their representation in the district enrollment.

7. In the sample of 832 at-risk students, 44.4 percent attended summer school to "make-up" coursework that they had failed. Of the students who attended summer school, nearly 75 percent were promoted. The students who were enrolled in summer school tended to take classes in the subjects that they failed during the year and sixty-eight percent of these students took English and mathematics courses.

8. A survey of elementary school teachers' perceptions of intervention strategies and policy implementation indicated that nearly three-fourths of the teachers thought that parents followed through somewhat with home intervention activities. A total of 83.5 percent of the teachers followed the procedures outlined in the policy and used placement in the reading textbook to determine if a student was at-risk. Slightly more than half of the teachers indicated that they used the intervention packets. Instructional activities were conducted primarily by teachers and within the classroom setting. At-risk students were reported to receive 15.9 minutes more a day of additional reading time involving tutoring than did students who were not at-risk. Basic skills classes and labs were rated by 90.5 percent of the teachers as "effective" to "very effective" interventions.

9. Two-thirds of the teachers indicated that the intervention strategies used for students identified as at risk were no different from those approaches used with low achieving students in previous years. The key strength of the policy was that the parents were informed that their child was at risk of retention early in the school year. According to the teachers, the chief weakness in the policy implementation as that not enough time or support was given for teachers to provide assistance to the at-risk students.

10. The findings from empirical studies of primary alternative programs on promotion and retention show mixed results. Some studies lend limited support to alternative primary programs and some to the idea that promoting the at-risk student may be more advantageous than retention. The two district schools which tried an alternative primary program were pleased with their results.

III. Recommendations for Staff Action

Based on the evaluation findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made.

1. It is recommended that the district's promotion and retention committee conduct an analysis of school site personnel, resources, and existing programs that are available to determine ways of providing assistance to classroom teachers and meeting the specific learning needs of identified at-risk students. Particular attention needs to be given to improving the delivery of services to students in the primary grades who are in the ethnic/racial groups overrepresented in the population of retained students.

2. It is recommended that the district's School Operations Division continue to monitor intervention plans that are developed for individual students to determine if the plans are actually in place, how they are implemented, if parents are involved, how resources are utilized and specific student outcomes.

IV. Rationale

The recommendations are based on evaluation findings that resulted from careful study of student records furnished by the Data Systems Department, historical data on elementary students from school operations, Cumulative Student Records, teacher surveys, and a review of the research literature on primary alternative approaches. Analyses of these data generated the evaluative findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Each recommendation addresses an identified program need.

V. Budget Implication

No immediate budgetary implications are foreseen as a result of the evaluation.

PROMOTION AND RETENTION POLICY IMPLEMENTATION STUDY

I
ISSUE/CONCERN

On May 21, 1985, the Board of Education adopted the Promotion and Retention Policy to be implemented districtwide for grades K-3 and 7-10 during the 1985-86 school year and all grades in 1986-87. As part of the Plan for Systematic Evaluation of the Regular District Programs, the Board of Education approved a two-year study of the Promotion and Retention Policy implementation. This report contains findings from evaluation studies that were conducted to describe the population of students who were retained during the 1985-86 school year and the various intervention strategies used with students who were identified as at risk of retention.

II
BACKGROUND

The Promotion and Retention Policy which was adopted by the Board of Education on May 21, 1985 states that students are to be promoted on the basis of academic achievement and maturity level. The overriding concern expressed in the policy is that promotion and retention decisions are based on what is most beneficial to the individual student. The policy embraces the concepts of early identification of students who need assistance, early notification of parents, and implementation of timely and effective intervention.

Students who are at risk of possible retention under the policy's guidelines are identified as early in the school year as possible. The criteria for identification are presented in the Promotion/Retention Policy Implementation Guide, September 1986 and vary according to grade level. Parents are notified that their child has been designated as a risk of retention and a written intervention plan be developed, implemented, and monitored to provide assistance for each student designated as at-risk. Parents should be involved in the intervention process. Prior to the last day of instruction, the principal is to make the final decision of: a) promotion with no further intervention; b) promotion with intervention; or, c) retention with intervention. The teacher, student, and parent should be closely involved throughout the process of identification, intervention, and the final decision. The final decision may be delayed for secondary students until second semester and/or summer school grades are received.

The Promotion/Retention Policy Implementation Guide contains specific intervention strategies and supplementary resources that can be used to provide assistance to elementary and secondary students who are identified as at risk of retention. The district has developed an Intervention Packet for elementary students identified as at-risk which supports the Houghton Mifflin Reading Program and provides materials designed to focus instruction on key reading skills, to increase program pacing, and provide testing materials which measure student progress and mastery of content.

A promotion and retention policy implementation committee composed of principals, teachers, and counselors from elementary and secondary schools and central office managers representing education services, staff development, evaluation, school operations, data systems, and budget was appointed to oversee implementation. The committee provides an overall communication and coordination role for the district in monitoring implementation of the policy components and developing recommendations for procedural changes. An evaluation was conducted to describe the implementation process and make recommendations for modification and improvement.

On May 13, 1986, the Interim Progress Report on the Implementation of the Promotion and Retention Policy (Evaluation Department Report No. 421) was presented to the Board of Education. The interim report consisted of an assessment of the first year of policy implementation including a description of the number of students designated as at-risk. A staff response to recommendations of the interim progress report on the implementation of the promotion and retention policy was presented to the Board of Education. Based on concerns raised by the Board of Education and the district's promotion and retention committee, questions were generated to further evaluate the implementation of the promotion and retention policy. The evaluation questions which were studied are presented below.

1. How many students in grades K-3 and 7-10 were identified as at risk of retention? How many students were retained?

2. How was the total number of students retained distributed among different ethnic/racial groups, males and females, and grade levels?

3. How do the numbers of students who were retained under the Promotion and Retention Policy in 1985-86 compare with the number of students retained in previous years?

4. Which courses were failed by at-risk students in grades 7-10 in terms of content areas and by racial/ethnic groups and achievement indices?

5. How many at-risk students in grades 7-10 went to summer school to "make up" coursework needed for promotion?

6. How did elementary school teachers describe intervention plans and strategies for at-risk students relative to parental response, differences with remedial reading practices used in the past, and types of reinforcements used to supplement the core program?

7. Which areas in the Promotion and Retention Policy were identified by elementary school teachers as needing change to enhance implementation?

8. What do major studies on primary alternative programs for at-risk students indicate regarding its effectiveness?

III
EVALUATION DESIGN

The main goal of the evaluation was to describe the student population identified as at-risk and retained in the first year of policy implementation in terms of their numbers, gender, grade level courses failed, and in comparison to historical trends. The numbers of students in grades K-3 and 7-10 identified as at risk of retention were reported by school principals to the Evaluation Department in February 1986. Student records furnished by the Data Systems Department were studied to identify students who had been enrolled in the same grade for two consecutive years (1985-86 and 1986-87) and retained during the risk year of the policy implementation. Historical data on elementary school student retentions were furnished by the School Operations Division for the years between 1977-1979. Elementary and secondary school students who were enrolled in the same grade for two consecutive years composed the data base of retained students for the years between 1980-1986.

A second goal of the evaluation was to provide an analysis of courses failed by secondary students at risk of retention. The Cumulative Student Records (CSRs) of 832 at risk students in grades 7-10 were examined to study courses failed relative to content area, ethnic/racial groups, and achievement indices. Using the student records supplied by the Data Systems Department, every third student with the program designation of "at-risk" was selected for inclusion in the study. Individual CSRs were examined for each student, and those students whose previous coursework indicated limited English proficiency or special education were removed from the sample. Only those students enrolled in the district program during second semester of 1985-86 and who had failing grades in English, mathematics, social studies, or science noted were entered into the analysis. An additional analysis using the CSRs was performed to determine the numbers of at-risk students who attended summer school to "make-up" courses needed for promotion.

A third goal was to evaluate the strategies used to provide assistance to elementary school students identified as at risk of retention. Elementary school teachers' perceptions of the intervention strategies and policy implementation were described using two different survey instruments. One of two survey instruments were mailed to a stratified random sample of 450 elementary school teachers. The population strata were school size, percent of at risk students reported in February 1986, and amount of external funding. One survey instrument required the teachers to respond to multiple-choice questions, and the other survey instrument had open-ended questions. Within the strata, fifty percent of the teachers were randomly selected to respond to one version of the survey and fifty percent to the other version. Of the total surveys sent, 38 percent were completed and returned (83 respondents for the multiple-choice survey instrument; 87 respondents for the open-ended survey instrument).

The data collection and analysis of reports from the school sites, Cumulative Student Records (CSRs), and surveys of elementary school teachers were conducted between February 1986 and April 1987. The findings are reported in four sections. The first section contains descriptive information on student retentions during the 1985-86 school year. The data analyses were performed by

Christina Baca, Evaluation Department. In the second section, the Cumulative Student Records were analyzed by Stuart Macnofsky, Evaluation Department. In the third section, the results from the teacher survey instruments are summarized from an analysis conducted by Paul Strand, Northwestern Associates. The fourth section contains a review of the research literature on alternative programs for at-risk students in the primary grades was conducted by Gail Takahata. The complete reports from Dr. Strand and Ms. Takahata are available from the Evaluation Department.

IV
FINDINGS

In this section of the report, findings are presented in three sections. **Section A** contains descriptive information on the numbers of students retained districtwide during the 1985-86 school year. **Section B** presents analyses of coursework failed and summer classes attended by a sample of at-risk students in grades 7-10. **Section C** summarizes elementary school teachers' perceptions of the intervention strategies and policy implementation obtained from the survey data section. **Section D** summarizes the research findings on primary alternative interventions.

Section A
Student Retentions: Descriptive Information

This section contains findings related to the numbers of students retained districtwide during the first year of policy implementation. Data obtained from individual school sites and reported in the interim report presented to the Board of Education on May 13, 1986 indicated that 6,140 students in grades K-3 and 7-10 were identified as at risk of retention. The criteria used to identify at-risk students are presented in the Promotion/Retention Policy Implementation Guide. The numbers and percents of students reported as at risk of retention is presented by grade level in Table 1. The highest percentage of at-risk students was reported in kindergarten and grade one. The lowest percentage was at grade seven.

TABLE 1
AT-RISK STUDENTS REPORTED BY GRADE LEVEL FOR FIRST SEMESTER 1986

	At-Risk Students	
Grade	Number	Percent*
K	1,088	11.0
1	1,204	12.4
2	794	8.8
3	617	6.0
7	444	5.5
8	699	8.5
9	705	7.9
10	589	6.4

*Percent of total grade enrollments

Table 2 presents the number of students who were retained during the 1985-86 school year. As noted in the Evaluation Design section of this report, these data were obtained by comparing student records maintained by the Data Systems Department to identify students who were enrolled in the same grade for two consecutive years. A total of 1,847 elementary students were retained. A total of 1,389 secondary students were retained. The highest number of retentions occurred in kindergarten and grade one. The lowest numbers were in grades three, eight, and seven, respectively. Although the data on student retentions are from a different source than the at-risk information, it should be noted that in all grades, particularly in kindergarten and grade one, considerably fewer students were retained compared to the numbers identified as at-risk.

TABLE 2
STUDENTS WHO WERE RETAINED REPORTED BY GRADE LEVEL

Grade	District Enrollment	Students Retained	
		Number	Percent
K	10,157	639	6.3
1	9,768	612	6.3
2	8,861	344	3.9
3	8,838	252	2.9
Total	37,624	1,847	4.9
7	7,914	293	3.7
8	8,158	277	3.4
9	8,698	414	4.6
10	8,719	405	4.6
Total	33,489	1,389	4.1

The number of students who were retained in grades K-3 and grades 7-10 by gender are presented in Table 3 and Table 4. The data are similar for elementary school students and the secondary school students in that approximately one-third more males than females are retained. The percent of females retained in grades two, three, and ten were slightly higher than at the other grade levels.

TABLE 3
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS RETAINED BY GENDER

Grade	Total Retained	Male		Female	
		Number	Percent*	Number	Percent*
K	639	390	61.3	249	39.0
I	612	369	60.3	243	39.7
2	344	199	57.8	145	42.2
3	252	147	58.3	105	41.7

*Percent of retained population at each grade level.

TABLE 4
SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS RETAINED BY GENDER

Grade	Total Retained	Male		Female	
		Number	Percent*	Number	Percent*
7	293	184	62.8	109	37.2
8	277	167	60.3	110	39.7
9	414	255	61.6	159	38.4
10	405	227	56.0	178	44.0

*Percent of retained population at each grade level.

Tables 5 and 6 show the district enrollments and percents of elementary and secondary students retained within each racial/ethnic group. Students classified as Hispanic, White, and Black constitute the three largest racial/ethnic groups in the district. The percents of Hispanic students and Black students who were retained is considerably higher than the percent of White students at the elementary and secondary levels. Although Alaskan/Indian, Pacific Islander, Portuguese, Filipino, and Indochinese represent a smaller percentage of the district's enrollment, relatively high percents of students within each group were retained at the elementary level particularly in the kindergarten and grade one. One exception is that none of the students classified as Portuguese were retained in grade one. Interestingly, with the exception of students classified as Alaskan/Indian, the percent of students in these same racial/ ethnic groups is much lower at the secondary level. Students who were classified as limited English proficient were not included in the sample. The number of students retained are presented by racial/ethnic groups and representative percentage of the population retained at each grade level in Appendix A.

TABLE 5

DISTRICT ENROLLMENTS AND PERCENT OF ELEMENTARY STUDENTS RETAINED WITHIN EACH RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP*

	Total District†		Hispanic		White		Black		Asian		Alaskan/ Indian		Pacific Islander		Portuguese		Filipino		Indochinese	
Grade	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
K	10157	6.3	2396	7.6	4211	4.2	1671	8.2	203	1.5	27	14.8	64	7.8	17	17.6	807	8.3	761	7.9
1	9768	6.3	2240	8.5	4167	3.8	1691	9.8	193	3.1	24	8.3	65	10.8	33	0.0	754	6.4	601	6.0
2	8861	3.9	1942	6.0	3837	1.7	1475	5.2	172	2.9	27	3.7	52	3.8	27	3.7	747	6.8	582	4.1
3	8838	2.9	2044	3.8	3754	1.5	1416	4.4	179	1.1	25	4.0	52	3.8	26	7.7	750	3.7	592	3.7
Total	37624	4.9	8622	6.6	15969	2.9	6253	7.1	747	2.1	103	7.8	233	6.9	103	5.8	3058	6.3	2536	5.6

TABLE 6

DISTRICT ENROLLMENTS AND PERCENT OF SECONDARY STUDENTS RETAINED WITHIN EACH RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP*

	Total District†		Hispanic		White		Black		Asian		Alaskan/ Indian		Pacific Islander		Portuguese		Filipino		Indochinese	
Grade	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
7	7914	3.7	1660	6.4	3420	2.3	1334	7.1	197	2.0	26	3.8	15	0.0	27	3.7	650	9.2	585	0.3
8	8158	3.4	1645	6.1	3639	2.6	1321	5.5	217	0.9	21	0.0	35	0.0	24	4.2	620	0.6	636	0.6
9	8698	4.8	1552	6.4	4203	3.9	1424	8.6	218	0.5	32	9.4	30	3.3	40	10.0	553	0.9	646	2.5
10	8719	4.6	1430	8.7	4472	2.8	1302	8.6	234	1.7	30	10.0	35	2.9	45	0.0	525	3.2	646	3.2
Total	33489	4.1	6287	6.9	15734	2.9	5381	7.5	866	1.3	109	6.4	115	1.7	136	4.4	2348	1.4	2513	1.7

*Does not include limited English proficient or special education students.

†Figures based on October 1986 Pupil Enrollment.

Tables 7 and 8 present a comparison of the elementary and secondary students who were retained with the total district enrollment for the racial/ethnic groups. Because of the small percentage of American Indian, Pacific Islander, and Portuguese students represented in the population of retained students, their numbers have been combined with the White students. At the elementary school level, Hispanic students and Black students were overrepresented in the population of retained students by 7.9 percent and 7.3 percent, respectively. Filipino students were overrepresented by 2.5 percent. White students were underrepresented in the retained population by 17.6 percent; Asian students by 1.0 percent; and Indochinese by 0.9 percent.

TABLE 7
COMPARISON OF ELEMENTARY RETAINED STUDENTS WITH
TOTAL DISTRICT ENROLLMENTS BY RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUPS

Racial/Ethnic Group	Percent of Students Retained	Total District Enrollment Percent	Percent of Difference
Hispanic	30.8	22.9	+ 7.9
White*	26.0	43.6	-17.6
Black	23.9	16.6	+ 7.3
Asian	1.0	2.0	- 1.0
Filipino	10.6	8.1	+ 2.5
Indochinese	7.7	6.8	- 0.9

*Includes American Indian, Pacific Islander, and Portuguese.

At the secondary level and presented in Table 8, Black students and Hispanic students were over-represented in the population of retained students by 12.8 percent and 12.2 percent, respectively. Students within the racial/ethnic groups who were underrepresented in the retained population are listed in descending order of frequency: White students by 14.2 percent; Filipino students by 4.7 percent; Indochinese students by 4.3 percent; and, Asian students by 1.8 percent. While the Filipino students were overrepresented among the elementary school retentions, they were underrepresented at the secondary level.

TABLE 8
COMPARISON OF SECONDARY RETAINED STUDENTS WITH
TOTAL DISTRICT ENROLLMENTS BY RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUPS

Racial/Ethnic Group	Percent of Students Retained	Total District Enrollment Percent	Percent of Difference
Hispanic	31.0	18.8	+12.2
White*	33.8	48.0	-14.2
Black	28.9	16.1	+12.8
Asian	0.8	2.6	- 1.8
Filipino	2.3	7.0	- 4.7
Indochinese	3.2	7.5	- 4.3

*Includes American Indian, Pacific Islander, and Portuguese.

Historical information on student retentions was used to compare the percents of students retained during 1985-86 to retentions in the years prior to implementation of the Promotion and Retention Policy. Table 9 presents the percents of students retained in kindergarten and grades 1-3 for the years 1977 to 1986. The trend of retaining higher percents of students in kindergarten and grade one appears consistent across the nine years. The percent of students who were retained increased steadily between 1977 and 1982 for all elementary grades shown in the table. Between 1983 and 1985, the percents of retentions in kindergarten and grade one did not show a distinct trend. However, retentions in grades two and three steadily declined during the same time interval. The percents of students retained in 1985-86 were higher than percents from the previous two years in grades one, two, and three. The percent of kindergarteners retained was slightly lower than in 1985.

TABLE 9
HISTORICAL TABLE: PERCENT OF STUDENTS RETAINED
BY GRADE LEVEL - ELEMENTARY

Grade	6/77	6/78	6/79	6/80	6/82*	10/83	10/84	10/85	10/86
K	3.14	3.50	4.23	4.81	4.76	5.40	7.30	6.50	**6.30**
1	3.85	3.90	4.91	5.35	6.09	5.80	4.90	5.30	**6.30**
2	2.10	2.18	2.97	3.03	4.15	4.20	3.30	3.00	**3.90**
3	1.05	1.07	1.69	2.02	2.51	2.40	2.10	1.40	**2.90**

*6/81 retention data are unavailable.

Table 10 presents the percents of students retained in grades 7-10 for the years 1983 to 1986. Data were not available for the earlier years. The percents of students in grades seven through nine increased steadily between 1983 to 1986. The percent of students retained showed a sharp increase in all grades including tenth grade in 1986. As with the elementary retentions, more data collected

over several years are needed before conclusions can be drawn as to whether or not the Promotion and Retention Policy has resulted in more students being retained. However, at this point, it appears that retentions in grades seven through ten are on the rise. Figures 1 and 2 depict this information graphically.

TABLE 10
HISTORICAL TABLE: PERCENT OF STUDENTS RETAINED
BY GRADE LEVEL - SECONDARY

Grade	6/83	6/84	6/85	10/86
7	1.00	1.20	1.50	3.70
8	1.00	1.20	1.80	3.40
9	2.30	2.50	3.40	4.60
10	3.20	2.20	3.40	4.60

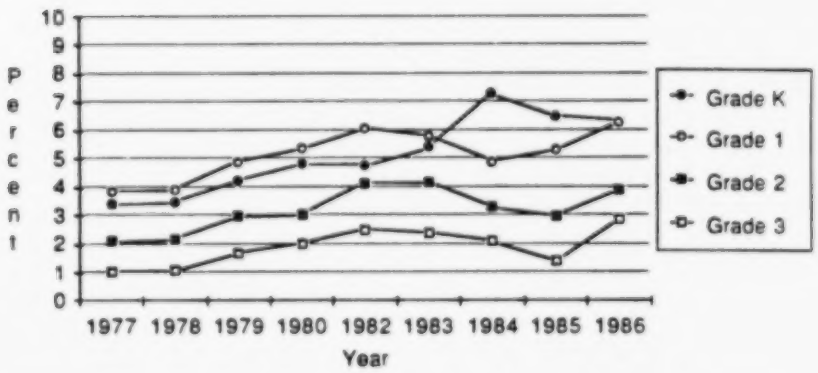

Figure 1. Percent of students retained between 1977 to 1986, Kindergarten to Grade 3.

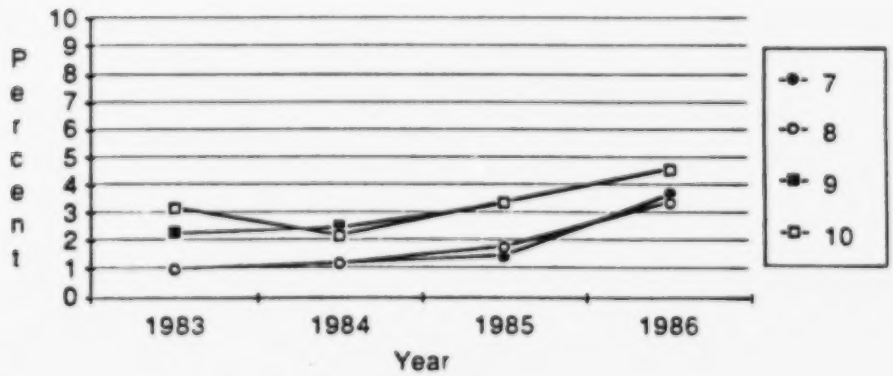

Figure 2. Percent of students retained between 1983 to 1986, Grades 7-10.

In summary, the percents of students retained in kindergarten and grades 1-3 and 7-10 ranged from 2.9 percent at grade three to 6.3 percent at kindergarten and grade one. The number of males who were retained exceeded females by one-third at all levels. Compared to their district enrollments, more Hispanic and Black students were retained. Fewer White students and Asian students were retained than their relative population in the district enrollment. The percents of students who are retained has risen steadily in grades seven through ten. The highest percent of students retained was noted in kindergarten and grade one and conforms with historical trends in the district. The methods by which student database information on retentions were analyzed is described in Appendix B.

Section B
Analyses of Coursework Failed by At-Risk Students

In this section, findings related to failed coursework from a sample of 832 students designated as at-risk in grades 7-10 are presented. A total of 524 (63 percent) of the at-risk students in the sample were promoted, and 308 (37 percent) were retained. The Cumulative Student Records (CSRs) for the individual students were examined to determine the distribution of failing grades relative to course content and student outcomes (promotion or retention). At-risk students whose previous coursework indicated limited English proficiency or special education were not included in the sample.

In Table 11, the numbers and percents of the at-risk students who were retained were presented in relation to their grades (passed or failed) and content areas (English, mathematics, social studies, and science). Failing grades in these subjects were used as criteria for identifying secondary students at risk of retention. Table 12 shows number and percentage of the retained students from the at-risk sample who received passing grades and who received failing grades in English, mathematics, social studies, and science. A total of 308 students were retained. Of these 308 students in each content area: 97 students (31.5 percent) passed English; 78 students (25.3 percent) passed mathematics; and, 191 (38.0 percent) passed social studies. In each of these content areas, considerably more of the retained students failed than passed the course. Nearly three times as many students failed than passed mathematics courses. However, in science courses, more of the retained students received passing grades (184 students, 59.7 percent) than failing grades (124 students, 40.3 percent). Ninety-nine percent of the students who failed English were enrolled in regular-level courses and 94.7 percent who failed social studies were enrolled in regular-level classes. Sixty-six percent of the students who failed mathematics were enrolled in regular-level courses; 30.7 percent were enrolled in lower-level classes; and 2.9 percent in advanced classes. Forty-five percent of the students who failed science were enrolled in regular-level classes; 50.9 percent were enrolled in lower-level classes; and, 4.4 percent were in advanced classes.

TABLE 11
NUMBERS AND PERCENTS OF RETAINED STUDENTS*
RECEIVING PASSING AND FAILING GRADES BY CONTENT AREA

	Passing Grade		Failing Grade	
Content Area	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
English	97	31.5	211	68.5
Mathematics	78	25.3	230	74.7
Social Studies	117	38.0	191	62.0
Science	184	59.7	124	40.3

*Number equals 308 students in each content area.

The sample of at-risk students contained 524 students who were promoted. Table 12 presents the number and percents of promoted students who received passing grades and received failing grades in English, mathematics, social studies, and science. Of these 524 students in each content area: 315 students (60.1 percent) passed English; 337 students (64.3 percent) passed mathematics; 354 students (67.6 percent) passed social studies; and, 420 students (80.2 percent) passed science. These data present a reverse trend from that noted with students in the sample who were retained. Considerably more students passed than failed their coursework. Also, as noted with the retained students, many more students received passing than failing grades in science coursework.

TABLE 12
NUMBERS AND PERCENTS OF PROMOTED STUDENTS*
RECEIVING PASSING AND FAILING GRADES BY CONTENT AREA

	Passing Grade		Failing Grade	
Content Area	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
English	315	60.1	209	39.9
Mathematics	337	64.3	187	35.7
Social Studies	354	67.6	170	32.4
Science	420	80.2	104	19.8

*Number equals 524 students in each content area.

Of the students who were retained and those who were promoted, 420 students failed English, 417 students failed mathematics, 361 students failed social studies, and 228 students failed science. In Table 13, the numbers of students who failed English, mathematics, social studies, and science are presented by racial/ethnic groups. Students with failing grades in each of the content areas were fairly evenly distributed among Hispanics, Whites (including Pacific Islander, Portuguese, Filipino, and Indochinese groups), and Blacks. The percentage of Asian students with failing grades in each content area was considerably lower than the other groups.

TABLE 13
NUMBERS AND PERCENTS OF STUDENTS WHO FAILED
ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS, SOCIAL STUDIES, AND SCIENCE
BY RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUPS

	Hispanic		White*		Black		Asian		
Content Area	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Total Number
English	129	30.7	132	31.4	147	35.0	12	2.9	420
Mathematics	128	30.7	137	32.9	144	34.5	8	1.9	417
Social Studies	106	29.4	111	30.7	132	36.6	12	3.3	361
Science	73	32.0	66	28.9	80	35.2	9	3.9	228
District Enrollment									
TOTAL 112,264		20.4		61.3		16.1		2.2	

*Includes Pacific Islanders, Portuguese, Filipino, and Indochinese classifications.

The data in Table 13 were compared to the distribution of racial/ethnic groups in the district as presented in the "Pupil Ethnic Census" report for the 1985-86 school year (November 16, 1985). The percentages of Hispanic students and Black students with a failing grade in English, mathematics, social studies, and science were disproportionately high in comparison to their total enrollment numbers in the district. The percentage of Hispanic students in the at-risk sample who received failing grades was elevated from 9.0 to 11.6 percent above their representative percent in the district of 20.4 percent. The percent of Black students receiving failing grades was elevated from 12.8 to 20.6 percent over their representative percent in the district of 16.1. The percent of Asian students receiving failing grades corresponded closely to their enrollment percent in the district. White students, on the other hand, received failing grades less frequently than would be expected based on their percent of enrollment in the district. That is, White students constitute 61.3 percent of the district's enrollment, and the percent of White students receiving failing grades ranged between 28.9 percent in science to 32.9 percent in mathematics.

The cumulative Grade Point Averages (GPAs) by letter grades (A, B, C, D, or F) as distributed among the sample of 832 at risk students is presented in Table 14. The cumulative GPA was used as an achievement index to determine grades earned by the at-risk student sample over time. A total of 637 students (76.5 percent) had cumulative GPAs in the "D" range (0.50-1.49) and "F" range (0-0.49) which indicate histories of low grades and academic difficulties. Most of the at-risk students in the sample (555 students, 66.7 percent) had a cumulative GPA in the "D" range. Nearly one-fourth of the sample (195 students) had cumulative GPAs in the "A," "B," and "C" (1.50 to 4.0) ranges.

TABLE 14
DISTRIBUTION OF CUMULATIVE
GRADE POINT AVERAGES (GPAs)
WITHIN AT-RISK STUDENT SAMPLE

Grades	Number	Percent
A 3.50 - 4.00	5	0.6
B 2.50 - 3.49	13	1.6
C 1.50 - 2.49	177	21.3
D 0.50 - 1.49	555	66.7
F 0.00 - 0.49	82	9.8
TOTAL	832	100.0

The distribution of the cumulative GPAs among the different racial/ethnic groups in the sample is displayed in Table 15. The majority of at-risk students with Hispanic, White which includes Pacific Islanders, Portuguese, Filipino, and Indochinese, Black, and Asian classifications had cumulative GPAs in the "D" (0.50-1.49) range. The percent of Hispanic students who had cumulative GPAs in the "F" (0-0.49) range was higher than noted for the other ethnic/racial groups. The percents of White and Asian students whose cumulative GPAs were in the "C" (1.50-2.49) range were elevated more than 10 percent above Hispanic and Black students. A total of 2.8 percent or 18 at-risk students had cumulative GPAs in the "A" (3.5-4.0) and "B" (2.50-3.49) range. These students were distributed among each of the racial/ethnic groups. Thirty-nine percent were Asian.

TABLE 15
DISTRIBUTION OF CUMULATIVE GPAs WITHIN AT-RISK
STUDENT SAMPLE BY RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUPS

Grade Point Averages	Hispanic		White*		Black		Asian		Totals	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A 3.50 - 4.0	1	0.4	-	-	-	-	4	9.8	5	0.6
B 2.50 - 3.49	2	0.9	4	1.4	4	1.4	3	7.3	13	1.6
C 1.50 - 2.49	37	15.8	79	28.1	49	17.8	12	29.3	177	21.3
D 0.50 - 1.49	159	67.9	181	64.4	194	70.3	21	51.2	555	66.7
F 0.00 - 0.49	35	15.0	17	6.1	29	10.5	1	2.4	82	9.8
TOTAL	234	100	281	100	276	100	41	100	832	100

*Includes Pacific Islanders, Portuguese, Filipino, and Indochinese classifications.

Table 16 presents the distribution of cumulative GPAs among the Hispanic, White, Black, and Asian at-risk students who were retained. A total of 308 students in the at-risk sample were retained. Of this total, 105 students (34.1 percent) were Hispanic, 93 students (30.2 percent) were White, 99 students (32.1 percent) were Black, and 11 students (3.6 percent) were Asian. A total of 221 students (71.8 percent) had cumulative GPAs in the "D" range. Within the White and Black groups, the retained students had similar grade distributions. In comparison, the Hispanic students had fewer GPAs in the "D" range and twice as many GPAs in the "F" range as did White and Black students. The numbers of Asians who were retained is small, and comparisons will not be made for this group.

TABLE 16
DISTRIBUTION OF CUMULATIVE GPAs AMONG
HISPANIC, WHITE, BLACK, AND ASIAN AT-RISK STUDENTS
WHO WERE RETAINED

Grade Point Averages	Hispanic		White*		Black		Asian	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A								
3.50 - 4.0	1	0.95	-	-	-	-	1	9.1
B								
2.50 - 3.49	1	0.95	1	1.1	2	2.0	1	9.1
C								
1.50 - 2.49	8	7.6	7	7.5	4	4.0	2	18.2
D								
0.50 - 1.49	65	61.9	72	77.4	78	78.8	6	54.5
F								
0.00 - 0.49	30	28.6	13	14.0	15	15.2	1	9.1
TOTAL	105	34.1	93	30.2	99	32.1	11	100

*Includes Pacific Islanders, Portuguese, Filipino, and Indochinese classifications.

Table 17 presents the number of students in the at-risk sample who attended summer school to "make-up" courses that they had failed. A total of 369 students (44.4 percent) attended summer school, and 463 students (55.6 percent) did not attend summer school classes. Of the students who attended summer school, 276 students (74.8 percent) were promoted, and 93 students (25.2 percent) were retained. Review of the CSRs indicated that 79.4 percent of the courses taken during summer school were passed by the at-risk students. Fifty percent of students passed with letter grades of "C" and above. The at-risk students who failed English, mathematics, and social studies, enrolled in summer school tended to take classes in the subject they failed. Sixty-eight percent of these students took English and mathematics classes in summer school.

TABLE 17
NUMBERS AND PERCENTS OF AT-RISK STUDENTS
IN SAMPLE WHO ATTENDED SUMMER SCHOOL

	Attended		Did Not Attend	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Retained	93	25.2	215	46.4
Promoted	276	74.8	248	53.6
Totals	369	100.0	463	100.0

In summary, analyses of failed coursework from the sample of 832 at-risk students showed that considerably more of the at-risk students who were retained failed than passed English, mathematics, and social studies classes. More of the retained students passed than failed science classes. When compared to district enrollments, more Hispanic and Black at-risk students failed coursework than the White and Asian students. Three-fourths of the at-risk sample students had cumulative GPAs in the "D" range. The Hispanic students had twice as many cumulative GPAs in the "F" range than the other racial/ethnic groups. A total of 369 students in the at-risk sample attended summer school classes to make up coursework failed during the school year. Of these students, three-fourths were promoted. Thirty-seven percent took English courses; 30.7 percent took mathematics, 15.8 percent took science; and 3.9 percent took social studies.

Section C
Intervention Strategies and Policy Implementation

In this section, the findings related to interventions attempted with students at risk of retention are presented. A survey of teachers' perceptions of the intervention strategies and policy implementation is summarized from a report prepared by Paul Strand, "San Diego City Schools, Promotion and Retention Survey," March 1987. His report is available from the Evaluation Department.

Table 18 gives a profile of the teachers who responded to the two versions of the survey by school size, percent of at-risk student population, and amount of external funding. The majority of teachers responding were from medium-sized schools with a student enrollment between 503 to 892. Most of the teachers were at schools with relatively low at-risk student enrollments (up to four percent) and a medium amount of external funding ($46,532 to $264,060). As indicated earlier in the report, 83 teachers completed and returned the multiple-choice survey instrument (#1). A total of 87 teachers completed and returned the survey instrument (#2) containing open-ended questions.

TABLE 18
PROFILE OF ELEMENTARY TEACHERS RESPONDING TO THE
TWO SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

	Survey #1*	Survey #2*
School Size		
Small (120-497 students)	32.3	32.6
Medium (503-892 students)	47.9	42.1
Large (over 909 students)	19.8	25.3
Percent of At Risk Students		
Low (0 - 4 percent)	50.0	40.0
Medium (5 - 8 percent)	29.2	36.8
High (over 8 percent)	20.8	23.2
Amount of External Funding		
Low (0 - $46,531)	22.9	23.2
Medium ($46,432 - $264,060)	49.0	43.2
High (over $264,034)	28.1	33.7

*Expressed in percents

Twenty-five percent of the teachers indicated that parent reactions to the promotion and retention policy were positive, 37.5 percent indicated parent reactions were somewhat positive, 18.8 percent indicated their reactions were neutral, 15.0 percent indicated their reactions were somewhat negative, and 3.8 percent indicated their reactions were negative. Teachers from large schools were more likely than teachers from small and medium size schools to indicate that parent reactions to the promotion and retention policy were positive (31.3 percent compared to 18.5 percent and 27.0 percent, respectively).

Teachers from schools with high external funding were more likely than teachers from schools with low or medium external funding to indicate that parent reactions to the promotion and retention policy were positive (36.0 percent compared with 25.0 percent and 17.9 percent, respectively). There were no significant differences between teacher perceptions at schools with a low, medium, or high percentage of at-risk students.

Twenty-eight percent of the teachers said that parent involvement with at-risk students increased as a result of the promotion and retention policy, 56.8 percent of the teachers said that parent involvement increased sometimes, and 14.8 percent said parent involvement did not increase at all because of the policy. There were no significant differences between teacher perceptions of parent involvement and school size, percent of at-risk students, or amount of external funding.

Only 2.5 percent of the teachers said that parents followed through extensively with home activities written in the intervention plan, 74.1 percent said that parents followed through somewhat with home activities, 19.8 percent said parents follow through very seldom and 3.7 percent said that parents did not follow through with home activities. There were no significant differences between teacher perceptions of parent follow-through and school size, percentage of at-risk students or amount of external funding.

Over seventy-five percent of the teachers indicated that they used more than one criteria to determine whether a child was at-risk. Placement in a reading textbook was cited as the criteria used by 83.5 percent of the teachers. Other criteria cited were as follows: student's performance in other subject areas (50.6 percent); magazine test scores (27.1 percent); students' maturity level (14.6 percent); and, other criteria such as teacher judgement, language skills, difficulty performing in the classroom situation, and inability to work independently were cited by 27.1 percent of the teachers.

Fifty-nine percent of the teachers said the current intervention strategies are somewhat different from previous practices, 34.7 percent stated that the intervention practices are no different; and 6.7 percent stated that the practices are very different. Teachers from small and medium size schools were more likely to state that the current intervention practices and strategies were no different from previous practices than were the teachers from large schools.

A total of 25.3 percent of the teachers stated that the current intervention strategies will enable at-risk students to reach grade level at a faster pace because of the greater parental participation that is encouraged and the organization and specificity of the intervention materials. A total of 26.5 percent of the teachers said that they did not think that the materials would enable students to reach grade level faster. Their most frequently cited response was that the materials did not allow enough time for the at-risk students to absorb and comprehend the materials. Of those teachers (48.2 percent) who were uncertain, most failed to give a reason for their uncertainty. Those teachers who responded gave reasons such as the amount of student progress depends upon parental participation and on the individual student's needs and problems.

The intervention activities were viewed by 89.5 percent of the teachers who responded to the survey almost always or usually support and reinforce basic reading instruction. The basic Houghton Mifflin Reading Program was used with at-risk students by 83.5 percent of the teachers. The Accelerated Program was used by 21.6 percent of the teachers. The classroom teacher conducted the instruction in the classroom setting for both programs.

A total of 54.6 percent of the teachers indicated that they used the intervention packets with their at-risk students. Over two-thirds (67.9 percent) of the teachers said that they conducted instruction with the intervention packets and 13.2 percent said the basic skills supplementary assistance program teachers conducted the instruction. Others cited as conducting instruction for the at-risk students with the intervention packets were resource teachers (5.7 percent), classroom aides (5.7 percent), and site resource teachers (1.9 percent). The instruction occurred mostly in the regular

classroom (70.6 percent), pull-out setting (21.6 percent), or deployed to another classroom (21.9 percent). Other intervention activities for at-risk students that were cited by the teachers include basic skills lab, reinforcement readers, home study, standardized reading evaluation, teacher-prepared instruction, individual tutoring, and parent help at home. Table 19 gives other activities included in intervention plans for the at-risk students. Table 20 gives the average number of minutes each day allocated to each activity listed for at-risk and the not-at-risk students by the classroom teachers. All of the intervention activities listed were more frequently used at large schools (student enrollment over 909) than at the small or medium size schools.

TABLE 19
ACTIVITIES USED BY ELEMENTARY TEACHERS IN
INTERVENTION PLANS FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

Activity	Percent
1. Parent help at home	90.5
2. Additional time with aide	75.0
3. Resource specialist	51.2
4. Additional homework	46.4
5. BSSAP referral	46.4
6. Nurse referral	45.2
7. Deployment for reading instruction	41.7
8. District counselor	41.7
9. Parent/community volunteers	41.7
10. Special material	41.7
11. Miller-Unruh teacher	40.5
12. Peer tutoring	40.5
13. Speech therapy	39.3
14. Focus by site IEP team	29.8
15. In-school counseling	23.8
16. Attendance incentives	23.8
17. Reading lab	21.4
18. Math lab	19.0
19. Computer lab	17.9
20. After school tutoring	15.5
21. Psychologist	13.4
22. Perceptual motor lab	3.6
23. Home visits by district staff	2.4

TABLE 20
AVERAGE NUMBER OF MINUTES ALLOCATED DAILY FOR
AT-RISK AND NOT-AT-RISK STUDENTS BY READING ACTIVITIES

Activity	Average Minutes Per Day		
	At-Risk	Not-At-Risk	Difference
Direct reading instruction	41.1	34.6	6.5
Supplemental reading activity with adult	25.4	17.1	8.3
Additional reading time involving independent or seatwork	36.9	36.3	0.6
Additional reading time involving tutoring during the school day	22.8	6.9	15.9
Additional reading time after school	16.2	9.5	6.7

Sixty-two percent of the teachers who responded to the survey indicated that the current Promotion and Retention Policy was a better approach than former approaches; 15.5 percent stated it was not better; and, 22.6 percent were unsure. Teachers who stated that the current policy was better than previous approaches cited the encouragement of more parent, teacher, and student communication and involvement as the most positive feature. Of those teachers who said that it was not an improvement over past approaches, the extra time and paperwork required were given as their explanation. Nearly 54 percent of those teachers who were not sure if the current policy was better stated that they were unfamiliar with the policy.

The teachers who responded to the survey instrument with open-ended questions (#2) rated specific intervention activities in terms of their effectiveness with at-risk students. Basic skills classes/labs/teachers were rated by 90.5 percent of the teachers as very effective or effective. Reading labs/club/teachers were rated by 94.1 percent of the teachers as very effective or effective. Classroom aide assistance was rated by 73.1 percent of the teachers as very effective or effective. Other intervention strategies rated as particularly effective included additional homework (53.9 percent very effective or effective ratings) and parent help at home (46.6 percent very effective or effective ratings).

Two-thirds of the teachers (66.7 percent) indicated that the intervention strategies used for students identified as at-risk under the Promotion and Retention Policy guidelines were no different than those approaches used with low achieving students in previous years. These teachers suggested that the delivery of intervention services to at-risk students could be improved by provision of more supplemental personnel (41.0 percent). Forty-five percent of the teachers thought the interventions should be the combined responsibility of in-classroom and supplementary staffs. There were no major differences between teachers' perceptions of where responsibilities for the interventions should be and school size, percentage of at-risk students, and amount of external funding. Additional intervention strategies that were recommended included workshop/packets of learning materials for parents, more individual assistance to at-risk students, more basic skills instruction, and Miller-Unruh teachers.

The strengths of the Promotion and Retention Policy were that the parents are informed in writing early (41.0 percent), that it encourages parent involvement with the child (21.8 percent), and that the policy is easily understood, uniform, and consistent (9.0 percent). Key weaknesses of the Promotion and Retention Policy were identified as the following: not enough time/support needed to adequately provide for at-risk students (20.3 percent); too much paperwork/time consuming (14.5 percent); retention of immature students does more harm than good (11.6 percent); parents shouldn't be able to decide if child is promoted or not (11.6 percent); and, nine weeks is too short--should be twelve weeks (10.1 percent) for identifying students at risk of retention.

In summary, 170 teachers responded to one of two survey instruments on the intervention strategies and the policy implementation. The teachers indicated that parental response to the Promotion and Retention Policy were generally positive. Approximately three-fourths of the teachers described parents as following through somewhat with home intervention activities. Placement in the reading textbook was the criteria used by 83.5 percent of the teachers to determine whether a student was at-risk. A total of 54.6 percent of the teachers indicated that they used the district intervention packets with their at-risk students. The instruction was conducted primarily by the teacher in the classroom. Other intervention activities for the at-risk students included basic skills lab, reinforcement readers, home study, standardized reading evaluations, individualized tutoring, and parent help at home. At-risk students were reported to receive 15.9 minutes per day more of additional reading time involving tutoring than did students who were not at-risk.

Basic skills classes/lab/teachers were rated by 90.5 percent of the teachers as very effective or effective. Two-thirds of the teachers indicated that the intervention strategies used for students identified as at-risk under the Promotion and Retention Policy were no different from those approaches used with low-achieving students in previous years. The key strength of the current policy was that the parents were informed in writing that their child was identified as at risk of retention early. A key weakness was not enough time/support to adequately provide assistance to at-risk students. Forty-five percent of the teachers thought that interventions should be the combined responsibility of in-classroom and supplemental personnel. The teachers suggested that the delivery of intervention services to the at-risk students could be improved by provision of more supplemental personnel to schools.

Section D
Literature Review on Primary Alternative Programs

A review of the empirical literature was conducted on grade retentions and primary alternative approaches by Gail Takahata. Her report is available from the Evaluation Department. Jackson (1975) conducted a review of the research done between 1911 to 1973 on grade retentions and concluded that, as a whole, there was no reliable body of evidence to indicate that retention is more beneficial than promotion for students with serious academic or adjustment difficulties. The findings of other researchers have also cast doubts about the benefits of retentions for students (Bocks, 1977, Wright, 1979, Powell, 1982, and Catherine, 1985). In fact, Bocks (1977) found that retention may not help the student, but may actually result in the student doing worse academically and socially the second time in the grade.

Studies have been conducted to examine the effects of primary alternative programs such as transition rooms; junior first grade; and, "readiness" rooms. Bell (1972) studied the effects of the transition room program on Detroit elementary school students. The at-risk students mainstreamed into a regular first grade did better academically and emotionally than did at-risk students placed into a transition classroom. Mainstreamed students showed greater academic gains on the Stanford Achievement Test and exhibited a more positive self-concept than the transition room students. Ninety percent of the mainstreamed students were promoted to second grade as compared to only 20 percent of the students in the transition room.

Raygor (1972) studied suburban school students and concluded that transition rooms did have a positive effect on at-risk students. Raygor compared the results of Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, the Bender-Gestalt Test and Metropolitan Readiness Test for students assigned to one of four groups. Group 1 consisted of students recommended for retention but instead were assigned to a transition room (Transition Group). Group 2 was comprised of students recommended for retention and were retained in a regular kindergarten classroom (Kindergarten Retained Group). Group 3 consisted of pupils recommended for retention but were enrolled in a regular first grade class (First Grade Potential Failure Group). Group 4 was comprised of a randomly selected group representing the school's general kindergarten student population (Random Kindergarten Group).

Raygor (1972) found that the Transition Group scored higher on the readiness test than the Kindergarten Retained Group at the end of the treatment year. These gains however appear to be only short-term ones. By the end of the third grade year, there was no difference between the groups either on academic achievement or school adjustment. There was also no difference in academic achievement (except in mathematics) between the two groups and the Random Kindergarten Group at the conclusion of the third grade. Students in the First Grade Potential Failure Group scored lower in academic achievement and school adjustment than students in the other three groups.

Matthews (1977) conducted a study similar to that of Raygor. Her experimental group was comprised of 163 students recommended for retention but instead were assigned to a "readiness room" prior to first grade. The results on achievement measures of the experimental group were compared to four control groups. Experimental Group 1, similar to Raygor's "First Grade Potential Failure Group," consisted of 60 students recommended for retention but due to parental objection or lack of space in a readiness room were assigned to a regular first grade classroom. Experimental Group 2 consisted of students randomly selected from the experimental group's kindergarten class that were progressing normally. Control Group 3 was comprised of students promoted from kindergarten but retained after first grade (similar to Raygor's Retained Kindergarten Group). Control Group 4 consisted of randomly selected kindergarten students from the year following the experimental group (similar to Raygor's Random Kindergarten Group). Matthews (1977) found that students in the First Grade Potential Failure Group (Control Group 1) achieved significantly higher achievement scores than students in the Retained First Grade Group (Control Group 3) both in the second and third grade. Students in the experimental group did not perform significantly better than students in the Normal Promoted Group (Control Group 2) or the Random Kindergarten Group (Control Group 4) on achievement tests in the second and third grades.

Although the transition room program may help a certain select group of students (mainly mixed-level achievers) it does not help the students that need it the most, that is, the low-achieving students. Low-achieving students scored less than the mean grade equivalent score standard. The transition room experience did not provide the elements necessary for low-achievers to catch up to their peer group (Gredler 1984). Zinski (1983) studied a pre-first grade transition room program and reported conclusions similar to that of Matthews (1977). The study found no significant difference in the reading and language scores of students placed in a transition room setting and of those students made to repeat the grade. There was also no significant difference in teacher ratings of student performances between the two groups.

A less commonly used alternative to the traditional retention/promotion dichotomy is the nongraded, continuous progress program. Nongraded, continuous progress programs allow for the differential rates at which students progress by allowing the student to resume the lesson he/she left off with in the previous term, thereby doing away with forced repetition and time-proficiency deadlines. Of the eight studies on nongraded continuous progress programs for grades kindergarten through third reviewed by Walker (1973), four reported results favoring nongraded, continuous progress programs, two reported no significant difference, and two reported results favoring graded programs. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to draw any solid conclusions from the review of the literature on nongraded, continuous progress programs. Walker (1973) strongly criticized this research for displaying, "a high degree of subjectivity in descriptive studies and a lack of specificity on the contrasted programs in the comparative investigations." (p. 209).

Primary alternative programs were attempted at two district elementary schools (Hamilton and Miller) during the 1986-87 school year. The programs were conducted similarly at both schools. In 1985-86, the kindergarten teachers identified low achieving students at risk of retention according to the Promotion and Retention Policy guidelines. Instead of retaining these at-risk students at the end of the 1985-86 year, they were placed into an accelerated kindergarten class in 1986-87 along with kindergarten students especially selected for their high ability. Instruction was at an accelerated pace; the district's Achievement Goals Program (AGP) was utilized; and, a full session (7:50 a.m. to 2:10 p.m.) was used. By June 1987, all of the "at-risk" students in the accelerated kindergarten class at Miller had been placed in a first grade classroom and the kindergarten students continued in the program. Parents and school staff were very pleased. The program was discontinued at Hamilton in January 1987 for administrative reasons, but the school staff had been very pleased with the students' progress. At the time that the program was discontinued at Hamilton, approximately 75 percent of the "at-risk" students had been placed in a first grade classroom.

In summary, the literature reviewed on alternative retention/promotion programs provide a mixed-bag of results. On the whole, research tends to support the idea that promoting an at-risk student to the next grade level is more advantageous than retaining the student. The extra year of retention provides no significant benefits (Chansky 1964; Dobbs and Neville 1967; Bocks 1977; Matthews 1977). Raygor (1972) on the other hand, concluded that the promoted at-risk students performed poorer on achievement measures than retained at-risk students. Results of studies on the effect of transition rooms also vary. In the short term, Raygor (1972) found that students in the transition rooms out-performed students who were retained. In the long run, the performance of

students in the transition room programs did not significantly differ from that of the retained group. Whether at-risk students in transition rooms perform better than similar at-risk students who were promoted is also highly debated. Bell (1972) and Zinski (1983) report that students in transition rooms do not perform significantly better than at-risk students who were promoted. Raygor (1972) and Matthews (1977), on the other hand, conclude that at-risk students who were promoted do not do as well as their transition room counterparts. The findings from the empirical literature lend support to the idea that promoting the at-risk student may be more advantageous than retention. However, the findings offer limited support that alternative program approaches such as transition rooms, non-graded continuous progress programs to retention. Alternative primary approaches to retention at the kindergarten level were attempted in two district schools during the 1986-87 school year.

Summary of Findings. Key findings from the evaluation of the promotion and retention policy implementation are summarized below:

1. A total of 1,847 elementary students and 1,389 secondary students were retained in the 1985-86 school year. The percent of students retained in kindergarten and grades 1-3 and grades 7-10 ranged between 2.9 percent of the enrollment in grade three to 6.3 percent in kindergarten and grade one. The percent of students who were actually retained was considerably lower than the percent of students identified as at risk of retention reported by the school sites. The large discrepancy between students identified as at-risk and retentions was particularly noted at the primary grade levels.

2. Approximately one-third more males than females were reported as retained at all grade levels.

3. At the elementary schools level, 7.9 percent more Hispanic students and 7.3 percent more Black students were retained than their relative population in the district enrollment. At the secondary level 12.8 percent more Black students and 12.2 percent more Hispanic students were retained than their relative population in the district enrollment.

4. Review of the percent of students retained yearly between 1977 and 1986 indicated that highest percent of retentions has been in kindergarten and grade one. Retentions at the secondary level have been steadily on the rise since 1983. The percentages of retentions in grades 1-3 and grades 7-10 increased in 1986 compared to previous years. The Promotion and Retention Policy specifies different criteria for retention of elementary students and for retention of secondary students.

5. Approximately twice as many at-risk secondary students who failed English, mathematics, and social studies courses were retained. A higher percent of at-risk students passed science courses irrespective of whether they were retained or promoted.

6. The percent of at-risk Hispanic students who received failing grades in English mathematics, social studies, and science courses exceeded by between 9.0 to 11.6 percent over their representative numbers in the district enrollment. The percentages of at-risk Black students who received failing grades were 12.8 to 20.6 percent in excess of their representation in the district enrollment.

7. In the sample of 832 at-risk students, 44.4 percent attended summer school to "make-up" coursework that they had failed. Of the students who attended summer school, nearly 75 percent were promoted. The students who were enrolled in summer school tended to take classes in the subjects that they failed during the year and sixty-eight percent of these students took English and mathematics courses.

8. A survey of elementary school teachers' perceptions of intervention strategies and policy implementation indicated that nearly three-fourths of the teachers followed the procedures as outlined in the policy and thought that parents followed through somewhat with home intervention activities. A total of 83.5 percent of the teachers used placement in the reading textbook to determine if a student was at risk. Slightly more than half of the teachers indicated that they used the intervention packets. Instructional activities were conducted primarily by teachers and within the classroom setting. At-risk students were reported to receive 15.9 minutes more a day of additional reading time involving tutoring than did students who were not at-risk. Basic skills classes and labs were rated by 90.5 percent of the teachers as "effective" to "very effective" interventions.

9. Two-thirds of the teachers indicated that the intervention strategies used for students identified as at risk were no different from those approaches used with low achieving students in previous years. The key strength of the policy was that the parents were informed that their child was at risk of retention early in the school year. According to the teachers, the chief weakness was that not enough time or support was given for teachers to provide assistance to the at-risk students.

10. The findings from empirical studies of primary alternative programs on promotion and retention show mixed results. Some studies lend limited support to alternative primary programs and some to the idea that promoting the at-risk student may be more advantageous than retention. The two district schools which tried an alternative primary program were pleased with their results.

V
CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The findings from the evaluation indicate that the highest percentages of students retained were in the primary grades in the first year of the Promotion and Retention Policy. This finding is consistent with historical retention trends in the district. A disproportionately high number of Hispanic students and Black students were retained at elementary and secondary school levels.

More elementary school students were retained in 1985-86 than designated as at-risk following the policy guidelines. The empirical findings from the research literature on promotion and retention lend very limited support to the notion of in-grade retentions. While we have descriptive information about the types of students who are identified as at-risk and retained, the effectiveness of the intervention plans as a proactive procedure to increase student success patterns is not known. Systematic follow-up of at-risk students particularly among the primary grades and racial/ethnic groups overrepresented among the population of students retained is needed. In addition, many different intervention strategies were listed by teachers as being attempted with students at risk of retention. The service delivery patterns and overlap among programs available to at-risk students needs to be examined, and where possible and appropriate, consolidated though existing resources at the site level to provide a way for staff to carry out problem-solving and follow-up of students.

Recommendations for Staff Action

Based on the evaluation findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made.

1. It is recommended that the district's promotion and retention committee conduct an analysis of school site personnel, resources, and existing programs that are available to determine ways of providing assistance to classroom teachers and meeting the specific learning needs of at-risk students. Particular attention needs to be given to improving the delivery of services to students in the primary grades who are in the racial/ethnic groups overrepresented in the population of retained students.

2. It is recommended that the School Operations Division continue to monitor intervention plans developed for individual students to determine if the plans are actually in place, how they are implemented, if parents are involved, how resources are utilized and specific student outcomes.

VI.
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APPENDIX A
NUMBER AND PERCENT OF STUDENTS RETAINED
BY GRADE AND RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP

The numbers of elementary students and secondary students who were retained as distributed among different racial/ethnic groups are presented in Tables A and B, respectively. These data do not include limited English proficient or special education students. Hispanic students composed the highest percent of the students who were retained in kindergarten through grade three. A total of 568 Hispanic students (30.8 percent) were retained in kindergarten and grades 1-3. The percents of students among the White and Black racial/ethnic groups who were retained was very similar. A total of 456 White students (24.8 percent) and 441 Black students (23.9 percent) were retained in kindergarten and grades 1-3. Remaining racial/ethnic groups represented are listed in descending order of frequency in the population of retained students: Filipino; Indochinese; Asian; American Indian; Pacific Islander; and, Portuguese.

As a group, White students composed the highest number of retained students at the secondary school level. A total of 455 White, secondary school students (32.8 percent) were retained. The second and third largest racial/ethnic groups retained were Hispanic students (331 students, 31.0 percent) and Black students (402 students, 28.9 percent). It should be noted that many more White students were retained at ninth grade, and higher numbers of Hispanic and Black students were retained at seventh grade. Remaining racial/ethnic groups are represented in descending order of frequency with the population of retained students: Indochinese; Filipino; Asian; American Indian; Portuguese; and, Pacific Islander.

TABLE A
NUMBER AND PERCENT OF ELEMENTARY STUDENTS RETAINED BY
GRADE AND RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP*

	Total Retained	Hispanic		White		Black		Asian		Alaskan/ Indian		Pacific Islander		Portuguese		Filipino		Indochinese	
Grade	Number	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
K	639	183	28.6	177	27.7	137	21.4	3	0.5	4	0.6	5	0.8	3	0.5	67	10.5	60	9.4
1	612	190	31.0	158	25.8	165	27.0	6	1.0	2	0.3	7	1.1	0	0.0	48	7.8	36	5.9
2	344	118	34.3	65	18.9	77	22.4	5	1.5	1	0.3	2	0.6	1	0.3	51	14.8	24	7.0
3	252	77	30.6	56	22.2	62	24.6	2	0.8	1	0.4	2	0.8	2	0.8	28	11.1	22	8.7
Total	1,847	568	30.8	456	24.7	441	23.9	16	0.9	8	0.4	10	0.5	6	0.3	194	10.5	142	7.7

TABLE B
NUMBER AND PERCENT OF SECONDARY STUDENTS RETAINED BY
GRADE AND RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP*

	Total Retained	Hispanic		White		Black		Asian		Alaskan/ Indian		Pacific Islander		Portuguese		Filipino		Indochinese	
Grade	Number	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
7	293	107	36.5	77	26.3	95	32.4	4	1.4	1	0.3	0	0.0	1	0.3	6	2.0	2	0.7
8	277	100	36.1	93	33.6	73	26.4	2	0.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.4	4	1.4	4	1.4
9	414	100	24.2	162	39.1	122	29.5	1	0.2	3	0.7	1	0.2	4	1.0	5	1.2	16	3.9
10	405	124	30.6	123	30.4	112	27.7	4	1.0	3	0.7	1	0.2	0	0.0	17	4.2	21	5.2
Total	1,389	431	31.0	455	32.8	402	28.9	11	0.8	7	0.5	2	0.1	6	0.4	32	2.3	43	3.2

*Does not include limited English proficient or special education students.

APPENDIX B
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN STUDENTS IDENTIFIED
AS RETAINED USING TWO METHODS

A final note concerns the discrepancy found in the numbers of students designated as retained in the 1985-86 school year. An analysis of historical tapes of student records for 1985-86 was performed to identify students who were enrolled in the same grade for two consecutive years, that is, in 1985-86 and 1986-87. The analysis was performed in April 1987. The numbers of students who were identified as retained in this manner are presented in Column 1 of Table C. These numbers were used as the baseline data in evaluation. Previous analyses had been performed to identify students who were designated by sites as at-risk or retained using the district student designation procedure. The latter analyses were completed in October 1986, and are presented in Column 2. These columns (1 and 2) should reconcile, but they do not. The differences between column 1 and column 2 data are presented in Column 3. The lower retention numbers obtained for grades seven through ten may have been due to promotions as a result of credits earned in summer school or other factors. The higher numbers of students found in kindergarten and grades 1-3 who were retained are less easy to explain. The differences may be due to inaccurate designation by sites for the district records and/or that the students who were retained were not designated as at-risk according to the policy. Clearly, more elementary students were retained than could be identified by examining the records of only those students who were designated as at-risk.

TABLE C
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN STUDENTS IDENTIFIED
AS RETAINED USING TWO METHODS

	1	2	3	
			Differences	
Grade	Students Retained	Students Designated As Retained	Number	Percent
K	639	536	103	16
1	612	500	112	18
2	344	236	108	31
3	252	170	82	33
7	293	305	- 12	- 4
8	277	306	- 29	- 10
9	414	476	- 62	- 15
10	405	414	- 9	- 2